DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 772 CG 017 901

AUTHOR Lewis, Ellen T.; McCarthy, Patricia R.
TITLE Gender-Related Factors Affecting Perceptions of Self-Disclosure.
PUB DATE Aug 84
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (92nd, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 24-28, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; Higher Education; *Self Disclosure (Individuals); *Sex Differences; Sex Role

ABSTRACT

In an attempt to understand the relationships among the gender of the self-discloser, the masculinity-femininity of the disclosure statement, and the sex role orientation of subjects rating disclosure statements, 160 male and female undergraduates were randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions. In the first condition, the self-disclosure items on the Self-Disclosure Rating Form (SDRF) were from tape recordings of men's conversations. In the second condition the same disclosure items were from tape recordings of women's conversations. Subjects rated the items for intimacy level and commonness; they then completed the Inventory of Learning Processes as a masking task; and the Bem Sex Role Inventory, for classification as either feminine, masculine, or androgynous. Results showed that feminine disclosures were rated as significantly more intimate and common than masculine disclosures. Masculine disclosures made by women were rated as significantly less common than feminine disclosures by women, and masculine or feminine disclosures by men. Sex role orientation had no significant effects. The results suggest that the masculinity-femininity of self-disclosure is an important dimension; they challenge previous research that has failed to consider this dimension. (Author/LLL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED251772

Gender-Related Factors Affecting Perceptions of Self-Disclosure

Ellen T. Lewis and Patricia R. McCarthy

Southern Illinois University

Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Conference, Toronto, Canada, August, 1984.

CG 017901

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patricia R. McCarthy

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Gender-Related Factors Affecting Perceptions of Self-Disclosure

ABSTRACT

One hundred and sixty androgynous, masculine, and feminine subjects rated the intimacy level and commonness of pre-judged masculine and feminine self-disclosures made by either men or women. Feminine disclosures were rated as significantly more intimate and common than masculine disclosures. Masculine disclosures made by women were rated as significantly less common than feminine disclosures by women, and masculine or feminine disclosures by men. Sex-role orientation had no significant effects. The results suggest that the masculinity-femininity of self-disclosure is an important dimension; they challenge previous research that has failed to consider this dimension.

Gender-Related Factors Affecting Perceptions of Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure has been widely studied during the past decade. Relationships between self-disclosure and good mental health (Jourard, 1971; Cozby, 1973), interpersonal attraction (Altman & Taylor, 1973), and positive counseling process (Grantham, 1973; McCarthy & Betz, 1978) have been investigated. Self-disclosure has been defined as verbal communication about oneself to another and has been conceptualized as a multidimensional concept that includes amount revealed, intimacy level, duration, affective manner, and disclosure flexibility (Chelune, Skiffington & Williams, 1981).

The relationship between self-disclosure and gender differences has been increasingly researched (c.f. Chelune, 1976; Chelune et al., 1981; Cunningham, in press; Derlega & Chaiken, 1976; Kleinke & Kahn, 1978). For example, it has been found that females are generally seen as more likeable, adjusted, and acceptable when they disclose more intimately, while the reverse is true for males who disclose intimately. Observers have perceived disclosure intimacy differentially on the basis of gender of the discloser, i.e., equivalent disclosures by males being perceived as more intimate than disclosures by females (Chelune et al., 1981). Furthermore, male observers have viewed individuals who disclose content that is incongruent to their gender (i.e., feminine content by males, masculine content by females) as less adjusted and less likeable than those who disclose sex-role congruence and content (i.e., males disclosing masculine content, females disclosing feminine content).

Sex-role orientation of the self-discloser and recipient of

self-disclosure have also been found to affect preferences of who would most likely disclose to whom (Rosenfeld, Civikly & Herron, 1979). Furthermore, Bem (1979) proposed that individuals differing in sex-role orientation vary in, (a) the content of their beliefs about what the sexes are like, and (b) have different cognitive schemata for processing gender-related information.

The present study was an attempt to further understand the relationships among gender of the self-discloser, the masculinity-femininity of the disclosure statement, and the sex-role orientation of subjects who rated the disclosure statements. Specifically, masculine, feminine, and androgynous raters' perceptions of the intimacy and commonness of masculine versus feminine self-disclosures by either males or females were examined.

Based on theoretical and empirical considerations, it was hypothesized that raters would perceive disclosures by males as significantly more intimate and less common than disclosures by females. Furthermore, raters would perceive gender-incongruent disclosures (masculine disclosures by females, feminine disclosures by males) as significantly more intimate and less common than gender-congruent disclosures. It was predicted that there would be no significant differences between androgynous raters' perceptions of disclosures by men versus women, while it was hypothesized that masculine and feminine sex-typed raters would perceive disclosures by men as significantly more intimate than disclosures by women.

METHOD

One-hundred and sixty male and female undergraduates from beginning psychology courses at a large midwestern university participated in this

study. Each student received course credit for participating. They each completed a packet of the following research instruments.

Self-Disclosure Rating Form. The Self-Disclosure Rating Form (SDRF), developed for the present study, consists of 44 self-disclosure statements, 18 masculine, 18 feminine, and 8 neutral. Each statement was derived from topic categories in the moderately intimate section of the Intimacy Rating Scale (IRS; Strassberg & Anchor, 1974). The specific statements were rated by 7 male and 12 female judges in a pilot study as either strongly masculine or strongly feminine self-disclosure items. A typical masculine item is: "I spend a lot of time lifting weights each day." A typical feminine item is: "I bake and sew." Subjects are asked to rate each item for intimacy level on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 = non-intimate (information people would be willing to share with someone they did not know well), and 7 = highly intimate (material people would probably share with only one of their closest friends). Subjects are also asked to rate the commonness of each item, where 1 = uncommon (information people do not usually tell about themselves), and 7 = highly common (information people frequently tell about themselves). Half of the subjects were assigned to the masculine condition where only their ratings of the masculine items on the SDRF were evaluated, while the other half were assigned to the feminine condition where only their ratings of feminine items were evaluated. Neutral items were not examined in the present study.

Inventory of Learning Processes. The Inventory of Learning Processes

(ILF; Schmeck, Ribich, & Ramanaiah, 1977) served as a masking task to decrease carry-over from the SDRF to the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. The ILP is a 62-item, forced choice inventory that assesses general learning strategies in academic settings.

Bem Sex-Role Inventory. Subject sex-role orientation was evaluated by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974). The BSRI consists of 20 feminine and 20 masculine personality characteristics, and 20 neutral, socially desirable items. Subjects indicate the degree to which each item is representative of them on 1 to 7 scale, where 1 = never or almost never true, and 7 = always or almost always true. Subjects who scored above the median on both masculine and feminine scales (masculine median = 4.89; feminine median = 4.87) were classified androgynous (reporting characteristics of both sexes). Females who scored above the median on the feminine scale but not the masculine scale, were classified as feminine; males who scored above the median on the masculine scale but not the feminine scale, were classified as masculine. A small percentage of subjects who were either undifferentiated (scored below the median on both scales) or sex-reversed (masculine females and feminine males) were excluded from the analysis. Eighty subjects were androgynous (40 males and 40 females), 40 were masculine, and 40 were feminine.

Procedure. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions. In the first condition, the self-disclosure items on the SDRF were ostensibly from "tape recordings of conversations by various men who live in different areas of this state." (of the location of this study). In the second condition, the same disclosure items on the SDRF

were ostensibly from "tape recordings of conversations by various women who live in different areas of this state." Both verbal and written instructions were given. Subjects completed the three instruments and then were debriefed.

RESULTS

Univariate analyses of variance were conducted to assess main and interactive effects of discloser gender, content of disclosure (masculine versus feminine), and sex-role orientation of the rater (masculine, feminine, androgynous male, androgynous female) on ratings of disclosure intimacy and commonness. Planned and post hoc comparisons were conducted where appropriate. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of self-disclosure intimacy and commonness ratings. There were significant main effects for content of self-disclosure on ratings of both intimacy and commonness, $F(1,144) = 24.16$, $p < .001$, and $F(1,144) = 8.43$, $p < .05$, respectively. Feminine disclosures were rated as significantly more intimate (mean = 72.04) than masculine disclosures (mean = 59.48). They were also rated as significantly more common (mean = 69.54) than masculine disclosures (mean = 63.69). There was also a significant interaction between disclosure content and gender of discloser on ratings of commonness, $F(1,144) = 8.83$, $p < .05$. Planned comparisons ($p < .05$) indicated that masculine disclosures by women were rated as significantly less common (mean = 58.26) than either feminine disclosures by women (mean = 70.90), masculine disclosures by men (mean = 68.37), or feminine disclosures by men (mean = 68.17). There were no other significant main or interactive effects. An analysis of the correlation matrix indicated that the variables

of intimacy and commonness were not significantly correlated.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that the masculinity versus femininity of self-disclosure is an important dimension that affects raters' perceptions of disclosure intimacy and commonness. The present findings call into question the validity of self-disclosure assessment devices such as the Intimacy Rating Scale (IRS; Strassberg & Anchor, 1974) which have failed to consider this dimension. For example, all of the topics in the present study were from the moderately intimate category on the IRS. However, feminine statements were perceived by the present raters as more intimate than equivalent masculine statements. Furthermore, the results of several previous studies of self-disclosure intimacy (Archer & Berg, 1978; Chaiken & Derlega, 1974; Chelune, 1976) must be interpreted cautiously because they also failed to consider the masculine versus feminine content of the disclosures.

The finding that feminine disclosures were rated as more intimate than masculine disclosures may possibly be explained by the fact that disclosures of weakness and vulnerability (feminine experiences) are seen as more risky than disclosures of power and competitiveness (masculine experiences). Feminine disclosures were also rated as more common than masculine disclosures. One conclusion is that moderately intimate self-disclosure is more common for females than males. This finding supports Jourard and Laskow's (1958) conclusion that females disclose more intimately than males. Future research examining perceptions of highly intimate masculine versus feminine self-disclosure may be helpful in shedding more light on this issue.

The finding that masculine self-disclosures by women were rated as least common, lends support to the findings (e.g., Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Gilbert, Deutsch, & Strahan, 1978) that non-traditional sex-role behaviors are regarded as less common than traditional ones. This may be especially true when females violate sex-role expectations. Additional research is necessary to understand the effects of discloser gender on perceptions of self-disclosure intimacy and commonness. Salience and clarity of the gender identity of the discloser are essential.

Contrary to our predictions, sex-role orientation did not significantly affect rater perceptions of gender-related self-disclosures. An examination of this variable for its effects revealed that the largest difference between mean ratings of intimacy and commonness was between masculine males and feminine females. The means for the androgynous male subjects were closest to the means for the masculine male subjects, while the means for the androgynous females were closest to the means for the feminine females. These results may support the idea that physical gender is more important than psychological gender (sex-role orientation) in influencing perceptions of disclosure. In support of this hypothesis, a post hoc analysis of variance indicated a significant main effect for physical gender of the subject on ratings of self-disclosure intimacy, $F(1,144) = 4.84$, $p < .05$. Females rated the self-disclosure items as significantly more intimate (mean = 68.70) than males (mean = 62.83).

A possible explanation for the failure to obtain main or interactive effects due to subject sex-role orientation is the controversial construct

validity of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Spence & Helmreich, 1980). Spence and Helmreich (1980) have argued that the characteristics underlying the masculine sex-type and the feminine sex-type on the Bem Sex-Role Inventory may not be generalizeable to the global concepts of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny.

A limitation of the present study is its pencil-and-paper nature. The use of live self-disclosures in future studies examining perceptions of self-disclosure may enhance the generalizeability of the present results to real life situations. Another limitation of this study is the use of only moderately intimate self-disclosure statements. Extension and replication of this study to include low intimacy and high intimacy self-disclosure statements may provide a more comprehensive view of the influence of the variables studied in the present research.

Finally, this study omitted the use of manipulation checks to monitor subject awareness of the disclosers' gender and used only female experimenters for administration of the questionnaires. The use of such controls as manipulation checks and random assignment to either a male or female experimenter could be advantagious in reducing the chance of experimental confounds.

In sum, this study suggests that masculinity versus femininity of self-disclosure is an important dimension that needs to be considered in future studies of self-disclosure. The present findings challenge the validity of existing measures of self-disclosure as well as some previous studies of self-disclosure intimacy. The findings also raise questions about the importance of sex-role orientation on raters'

perceptions of self-disclosure intimacy and commonness. Physical gender may be a more salient variable.

REFFRENCES

Altman, I., and Taylor, D. A. (1973). Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Archer, R. L., and Berg, J. H. (1978). Disclosure reciprocity and its limits: A reactance analysis. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 14(6), 527-540.

Bem, S. L. (1974). The measurement of psychology androgyny. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 42, 155-162.

Bem, S. L. (1979). Theory and measurement of androgyny: A reply to the Pedhazur-Tetenbaum and Locksley-Colten critiques. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 31, 1047-1054.

Broverman, I. K., Vogel, S. R., Broverman, P. M., Clarkson, F. E., and Rosenkrantz, P. S. (1972). Sex-role stereotypes: A current appraisal. Journal of Social Issues, 28(2), 59-78.

Chaikin, A. L., and Derlega, V. J. (1974). Variables affecting the appropriateness of self-disclosure. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 42(4), 588-593.

Chelune, G. J. (1976). Reactions to male and female disclosure at two levels. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 34(5), 1000-1003.

Chelune, G. J., Skiffington, S., and Williams, C. (1981). Multidimensional analysis of observers' perceptions of self-disclosing behavior. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 41(3), 599-606.

Cozby, P. C. (1973). Self-disclosure: A literature review. Psychological Bulletin, 79(2), 73-91.

Cunningham, J. A. (in press). Effects of intimacy and sex-role congruency of self-disclosure.

Derlega, V. J., and Chaikin, A. L. (1976). Norms affecting self-disclosure in men and women. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 44(3), 376-380.

Gilbert, L. A., Deutsch, L. J., and Strahan, R. I. (1978). Feminine and masculine dimensions of the typical desirable, and ideal women and men. Sex Roles, 4(5), 767-778.

Grantham, R. L. (1973). Effects of counselor sex, race, and language style on black students in initial interviews. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 20, 553-559.

Jourard, S. M. (1971). The transparent self. (2nd ed.). New York: Van Nostrand Co.

Jourard, S. M., and Laskow, P. (1958). Some factors in self-disclosure. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 56, 91-98.

Kleinke, C. L., & Kahn, M. L. (1978). Perceptions of Self-Disclosure: Effects of Sex and Physical Attractiveness. Wellesley, Mass.: Department of Psychology, Wellesley College.

McCarthy, P. R., and Betz, N. E. (1978). Differential effects of self-disclosure versus self-involving counselor statements. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 25(4), 251-256.

Rosenfeld, L. W., Civikly, J. M., and Herron, J. R. (1979). Anatomical and psychological sex differences. Self-Disclosure: Origins, Patterns and Implications of Openness in Interpersonal Relationships. Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Schmeck, R. R., Ribich, F., and Ramanaiah, N. (1977). Development of a self-report inventory for assessing individual differences in learning processes. Applied Psychological Measurement, 1(3), 413-431.

Spence, J. T., and Helmreich, R. L. (1980). Masculine instrumentality and feminine expressiveness: Their relationships with sex-role attitude and behaviors. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 5(2), 147-163.

Strassberg, D. S., and Anchor, K. N. (1975). Rating intimacy of self-disclosure. Psychological Reports, 37(2), 562.

TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Disclosure Intimacy and Commonness Ratings as a Function of Subject Sex-Role Orientation, Discloser Gender, and Sex-Type of Content

Variable	Intimacy Ratings		Commonness Ratings	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Subject Sex-Role Orientation				
Masculine Male Subjects	62.08	17.69	62.93	16.28
Feminine Female Subjects	69.71	17.25	67.10	11.53
Androgynous Male Subjects	63.57	16.94	66.36	13.75
Androgynous Female Subjects	67.68	17.35	69.26	14.56
N = 40				
Discloser Gender				
Male Discloser	67.46	16.77	68.25	12.75
Female Discloser	64.06	17.99	63.58	15.34
N = 80				
Content Type				
Masculine Content	59.48	16.17	63.29	13.62
Feminine Content	72.04	16.41	69.55	14.13
N = 80				
Total Group	65.76	17.42	66.41	14.18

Table 1' (continued)

Variable	Intimacy Ratings		Commonness Ratings	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Masculine Males-Male Discloser	64.05	17.49	65.11	14.44
Masculine Males-Female Discloser	60.12	18.11	60.76	18.04
Feminine Females-Male Discloser	74.29	16.78	67.90	10.66
Feminine Females-Female Discloser	65.13	16.87	66.30	12.55
Androgynous Males-Male Discloser	64.39	16.48	67.91	12.19
Androgynous Males-Female Discloser	62.74	17.78	64.82	15.31
Androgynous Females-Male Discloser	67.10	15.45	72.07	13.39
Androgynous Females-Female Discloser	68.26	19.44	66.44	15.46
N = 20				
Masculine Males-Masculine Content	53.14	16.22	60.67	17.77
Masculine Males-Feminine Content	71.03	14.51	65.20	14.75
Feminine Females-Masculine Content	63.14	15.83	64.12	12.94
Feminine Females-Feminine Content	76.28	16.40	70.08	9.30
Androgynous Males-Masculine Content	60.22	18.51	64.07	12.60
Androgynous Males-Feminine Content	66.91	14.93	68.66	14.77
Androgynous Females-Masculine Content	61.44	13.01	64.31	10.91
Androgynous Females-Feminine Content	73.94	19.13	74.21	16.25
N = 20				
Male Discloser-Masculine Content	60.09	14.52	68.32	10.90
Female Discloser-Masculine Content	58.86	17.82	58.26	14.31
Male Discloser-Feminine Content	74.82	15.73	68.17	14.51
Female Discloser-Feminine Content	69.26	16.80	70.90	13.79
N = 40				
Total Group	65.76	17.41	66.41	14.18

Table 1 (continued)

Variable	Intimacy Ratings		Commonness Ratings	
	M	S.D.	M	S.D.
Masculine Males-Male Discloser-Masculine Content	50.27	10.77	67.66	14.99
Masculine Males-Female Discloser-Masculine Content	56.01	20.53	53.69	18.26
Masculine Males-Male Discloser-Feminine Content	77.82	10.39	62.56	14.17
Masculine Males-Female Discloser-Feminine Content	64.22	15.29	67.83	15.59
Feminine Females-Male Discloser-Masculine Content	68.38	9.61	66.07	10.31
Feminine Females-Female Discloser-Masculine Content	57.89	19.39	62.16	15.45
Feminine Females-Male Discloser-Feminine Content	80.21	20.60	69.73	11.24
Feminine Females-Female Discloser-Feminine Content	72.36	10.44	70.43	7.49
Androgynous Males-Male Discloser-Masculine Content	59.49	19.81	70.64	10.75
Androgynous Males-Female Discloser-Masculine Content	60.96	18.15	57.50	11.11
Androgynous Males-Male Discloser-Feminine Content	69.29	11.28	65.18	13.47
Androgynous Males-Female Discloser-Feminine Content	64.53	18.19	72.14	15.89
Androgynous Females-Male Discloser-Masculine Content	62.23	11.13	68.92	7.46
Androgynous Females-Female Discloser-Masculine Content	60.60	15.22	59.69	12.19
Androgynous Females-Male Discloser-Feminine Content	71.96	18.10	75.23	17.34
Androgynous Females-Female Discloser-Feminine Content	75.93	20.88	73.19	15.95
N = 10				
Total Group	65.76	17.41	66.41	14.18